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A Guide to Understanding, Building and Sustaining an Effective Therapeutic Community

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A Guide to Understanding, Building and Sustaining an Effective Therapeutic Community

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Agency Introduction

The Leo A. Hoffmann Center is located in St. Peter, MN and provides residential treatment and outpatient services to adolescent males with sexual behavior problems. The residential program delivers services to 32 males between the ages of 11 and 18. The agency's philosophy is that “human behavior, attitudes, and values are learned, and that the treatment of adolescents is a controlled process of learning appropriate sexual and pro-social behavior.” A Therapeutic Community framework is utilized in the delivery of therapeutic services within the treatment setting.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate an understanding of therapeutic community/ milieu therapy concepts as well as building and sustaining an effective therapeutic community on each unit, in each cottage, and within Leo A. Hoffmann Center as a whole. This guide includes evidence based research that supports the use of therapeutic community principles, and interventions and evaluation tools that can potentially be used by Leo A. Hoffmann Center to enhance services. Ultimately, the goal of the project is to provide the agency with a tangible, well rounded resource that can be used by the multidisciplinary team to provide consistency throughout the agency, further enabling them, and the clients, to maximize treatment outcomes using Therapeutic Community principles.

Methodology

A manual titled *A Guide to Understanding, Building and Sustaining an Effective Therapeutic Community* was created after information was collected and organized using the following resources:

- ❖ Peer-reviewed, scholarly literature accessed from electronic data bases such as PsycINFO, ProQuest, and EBSCOhost. Key search terms included: milieu therapy, therapeutic community, residential treatment, adolescent treatment and treatment community.
- ❖ Books from the MnSU, M 's library related to juvenile residential treatment and milieu therapy.
- ❖ Resources from the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Mental Health, U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Minnesota Department of Corrections, the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, the Consortium of Therapeutic Communities, and NEARI Press.
- ❖ Leo A. Hoffmann Center's Policy and Procedure Manual.
- ❖ Person to person consultation with Leo A. Hoffmann Center staff (youth counselors, unit coordinators, therapists, clinical director).

Application of Five Key Concepts in Residential Treatment Programming

Attachment: Developing a sense of belonging.

- Welcome newcomers upon admission on the unit and in joining the therapy group.
- Invite newcomers into activities and conversations.
- Celebrate leaving with ceremony, rituals and gifts.

Containment: Developing a sense of safety.

- Strictly adhere to basic rules of safety.
- Build routine, structure and consistency into daily living.
- Provide supervision 24 hours a day and rank supervision levels based on client need.

Communication: Developing a sense of openness.

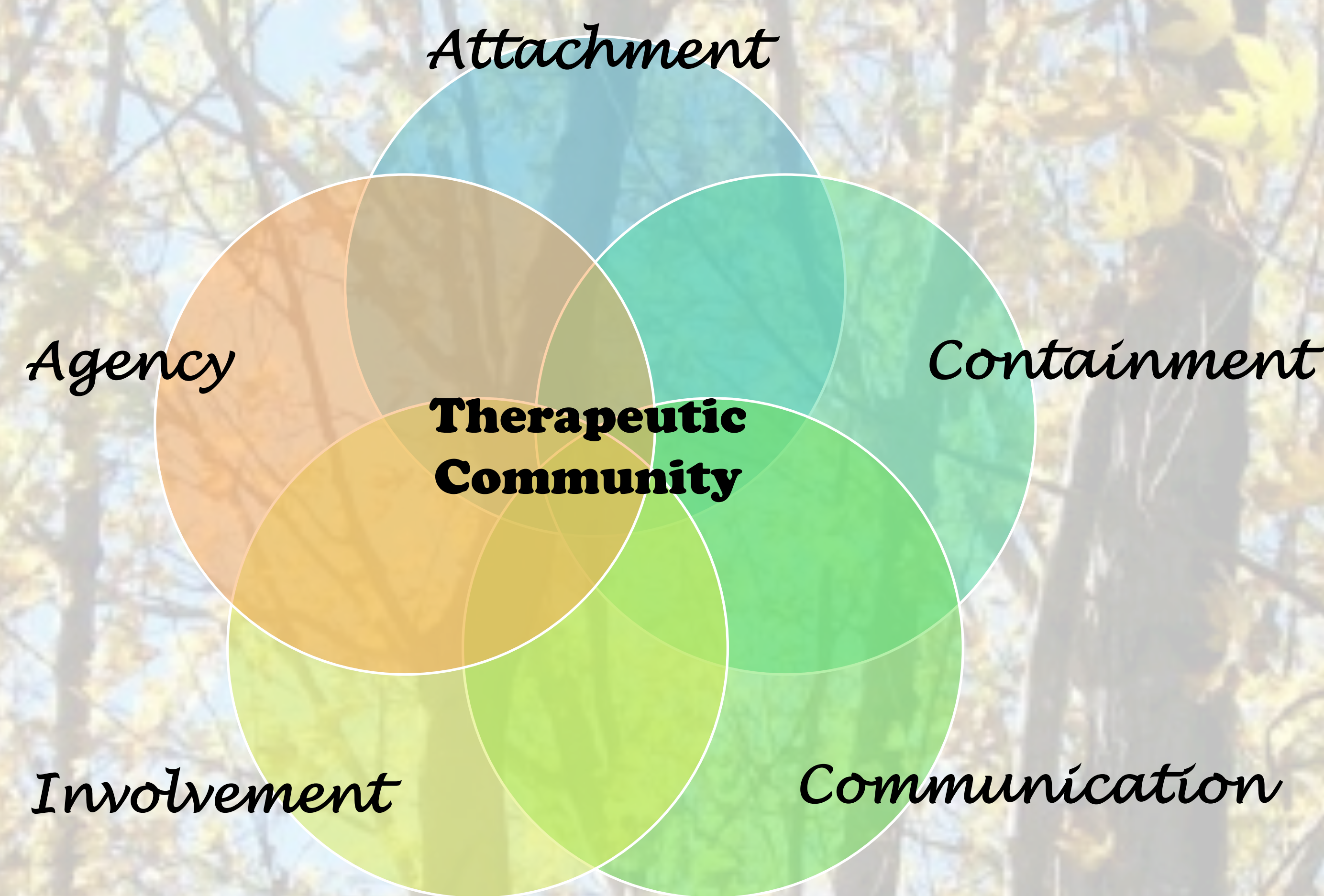
- Model openness to newcomers.
- Promote open communication in all areas of daily living.
- Invite “outside” members of client support network into treatment process.

Involvement: Developing a sense of “living-learning.”

- Intervene “in the moment” for continued skill development.
- Reinforce participation through positive peer pressure.

Agency: Developing a sense of empowerment.

- Share authority and decision making power among all community members.
- Increase accountability as clients progress in phases.
- Impart responsibility to oneself and one's unit.
- Provide “natural consequences” for violating rules and norms of the unit.



Implications and Recommendations for Social Work Practice

- ❖ Therapeutic Community concepts can provide clientele with a sense of safety, belonging, empowerment and accountability which has potential to maximize treatment outcomes.
- ❖ It can provide a secure environment for clients who have histories of victimization or other vulnerabilities.
- ❖ Consistency and repetition throughout the day will reinforce treatment related concepts to enhance learning.
- ❖ While Therapeutic Community concepts are practiced within the current programming at Leo A. Hoffmann Center, it is necessary that staff are better trained in these concepts to ensure intentional and consistent implementation.
- ❖ Currently, there is no evaluation tool used to measure the process or outcomes; though the Leo A. Hoffmann Center does collect some data for purposes of Continuous Quality Improvement.

References

References available from author upon request.



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